

Improving the Survivability of Released Rockfish

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting



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Vulnerable Rockfish in Washington

- Yelloweye and canary rockfish are considered overfished in ocean areas
 - In Puget sound, these species and bocaccio rockfish have been listed under the Endangered Species Act
- The primary tool used all along the US West Coast to rebuild these stocks is to prohibit retention
- Under rebuilding plans only a small amount of mortality is allowed
- On the coast, the WA recreational yelloweye harvest limit is 2.9 mt (in 2013 and 2014), that equates to approximately 1,000 fish

The Fate of Released Rockfish

- Rockfish have swim bladders to regulate their position in the water column
- Gases in the swim bladder expand when fish are brought to the surface causing bulging eyes and possibly forcing the stomach to expand –this is called barotrauma
- No one likes to see “floaters”

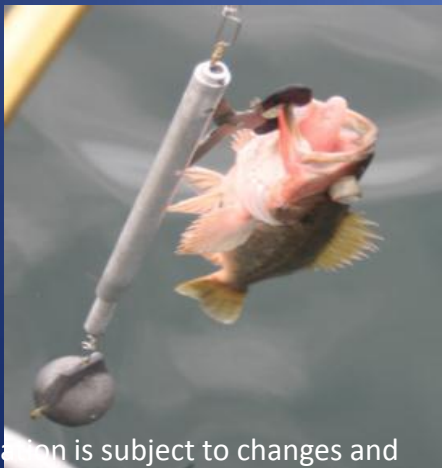
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What Can We Do?

- **Get those rockfish down!**
- **Recompression devices are simple and easy to use**
- **Recent studies have shown that recompression improves survivability for many rockfish species compared to fish released at the surface**
- **Yelloweye and canary rockfish have shown high recompression survival when caught in deep water**

Types of Descending Devices



Information is subject to changes and amendments over time.

December 6, 2013 Fish and Wildlife Commission
Meeting Presentation

Important to Remember

- Chose the device that works best for you
- Reduce the time on deck— survivability is greatest when fish are recompressed immediately – less than 2 minutes at the surface
- Mortality can double with every 10 minutes at the surface
- Limit handling time and avoid rough handling
- When properly released even fish with severe signs of barotrauma can survive
- Venting is not recommended as it may do more harm than good

Getting the Word Out

WDFW

- Developed “Protect Washington’s Rockfish” brochure and posters
- Updated WDFW web pages
- Presented information and demonstration on the use of descending devices:
 - Coastal charter offices and fishing groups
 - Puyallup Sportsman Show
 - Neah Bay and La Push for lingcod and halibut season openers

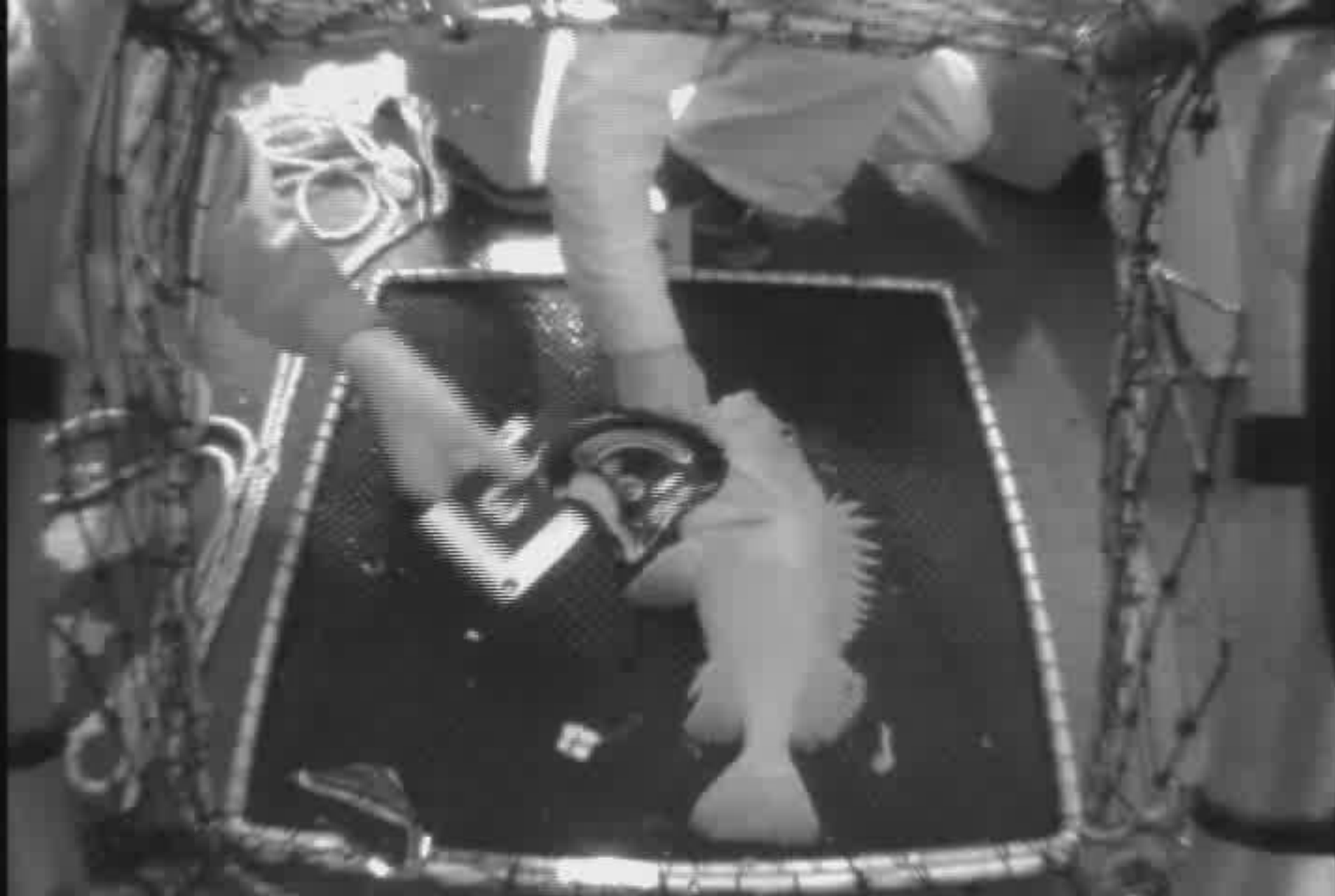
Puget Sound Anglers

- Developed “Save Our Fisheries” hand-outs
- Purchase and distributed hundreds of free descending devices
- Scheduled WDFW staff attendance at PSA meetings
- Presented information and demonstration on the use of descending devices:
 - Puyallup Sportsman’s Show
 - Seattle Boat Show

Mortality Rates for Released Yelloweye and Canary Rockfish

Species	Depth (fm)	Current Surface Mortality	Mortality with Descending Devices
Canary Rockfish	0-10	21%	21%
	10-20	37%	25%
	20-30	53%	25%
	30-50	100%	48%
	50-100	100%	57%
	>100	100%	100%
Yelloweye Rockfish	0-10	22%	22%
	10-20	39%	26%
	20-30	56%	26%
	30-50	100%	27%
	50-100	100%	57%
	>100	100%	100%

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Video courtesy of the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Newport

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